

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AGR-05

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, EAGR, PN

SUBJECT: INTERVIEW BY NEW MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

REF: PANAMA 4840

SUMMARY: IN PRESS INTERVIEW, NEW AGRICULTURE MINISTER PAREDES STATED THAT INCREASED PRODUCTION WAS ONLY ANSWER TO PROBLEMS OF INFLATION, THAT HIS GOAL WOULD BE AGRICULTURAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY, AND THAT HE HAD NO INTENTION OF MAKING MAJOR CHANGES IN HIS PRE-DECESSOR'S POLICIES. PAREDES HAS ALREADY VISITED OFFICERS OF PANAMANIAN COOPERATIVE FEDERATION POSSIBLY SIGNALLING THEREBY MORE VIGOROUS SUPPORT FOR COOP MOVEMENT FROM MIDA. HE HAS ALSO SCHEDULED PERSONAL VISIT TO AID OFFICES. PAREDES WILL CONTINUE AS NATIONAL GUARD G-1, MAKING HIM FIRST ACTIVE MILITARY OFFICER TO HOLD CABINET POST SINCE INCEPTION OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT IN 1968. WHILE WE REGARD THIS AS A FAIRLY CLEAR SIGNAL OF A COP PRIORITY FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION, IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO ASSESS WHETHER THE MOVE REPRESENTS ENHANCEMENT OF PAREDES' PERSONAL POLITICAL POSITION, OR PRELUDE TO DECLINE THROUGH EXPOSING HIM TO MANIFOLD PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL SECTOR. END SUMMARY.

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1. PRO-GOVERNMENT DAILIES "CRITICA" AND "MATUTINO" FOR SATURDAY, AUGUST 9, CARRIED LENGTHY REPORTS OF INTERVIEW GIVEN BY LT. COL. RUBEN D. PAREDES, NEWLY-DESIGNATED MINISTER OF AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (REFTEL).

2. BOTH PAPERS FEATURED PAREDES' VIEW THAT ONLY ANSWER TO CURRENT PROBLEMS OF INFLATION WAS INCREASED AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION; HIS PRIMARY GOAL WOULD BE TO UNIFY EFFORTS OF LARGE, MEDIUM AND SMALL PRODUCERS, ORGANIZED CAMPESINOS WITHIN AND OUTSIDE OF PEASANT SETTLEMENTS (ASIENTIMIENTOS), AND ASSISTANCE OF BOTH GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE ENTERPRISE, FOR INCREASED PRODUCTION. AIM SHOULD BE ULTIMATE SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN, AND CAPABILITY TO EXPORT, AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS; FOR EXAMPLE, COUNTRY SHOULD BE SELF-SUFFICIENT IN AND READY TO EXPORT RICE WITHIN THREE YEARS. OTHER COMMODITY HE SINGLED OUT WAS MILK, CALLING ATTENTION TO ANNUAL PRODUCTION DEFICIT OF 80 MILLION LITERS WHICH HE HOPED TO SEE REDUCED, IN LARGE PART THROUGH ACQUISITION, AT INSTRUCTIONS OF TORRIJOS, OF MILK CATTLE IN FLORIDA FOR MILK PRODUCTION IN HIGHLANDS OF VOLCAN AND CERRO PUNTA.

3. PAREDES NOTED THAT WHILE PRODUCERS' COSTS HAD INDISPUTABLY GONE UP THROUGH INFLATION (PARTICULARLY IN PETROLEUM PRODUCTS), SOME INDIVIDUALS HAD USED THIS AS EXCUSE FOR UNDUE INCREASES IN MARGINS OF PROFIT, OR FOR INDISCRIMINATE SPECULATION, CONTRARY TO NATIONAL INTEREST. HE WAS CONFERRING WITH MIDA STAFF AND HOPED SHORTLY TO PRESENT TO TORRIJOS A SPECIAL PLAN RELATING TO OPERATIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND OFFICE OF PRICE REGULATION; HE NOTED THAT MINISTER MUST DEAL WITH INTERRELATION, RATHER THAN A FUSION, OF THESE FUNCTIONS IN RELATIONSHIP TO OVERALL POLICY ON PRICES.

4. HE SALUTED PRESENT MIDA STAFF, STATING THAT ANYONE IN MINISTRY DEDICATED TO SERVING COUNTRY WOULD HAVE NO PROBLEMS WITH HIM. HE ALSO PRAISED POLICIES INSTITUTED BY HIS PREDECESSOR, GERARDO GONZALEZ, PARTICULARLY IN AGRARIAN REFORM, AND SAID THAT WHILE THEIR CONTINUED IMPLEMENTATION MIGHT REQUIRE ADJUSTMENTS ALONG THE WAY, THERE WOULD BE NO MAJOR CHANGES. MIDA WOULD CONTINUE TO BE LOCATED IN SANTIAGO, VERAGUAS; GEN. TORRIJOS HAD PLACED A HELICOPTER AT DISPOSAL OF MINISTER'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OFFICE TO FACILITATE HIS TRAVEL IN COUNTRYSIDE, AND HE SAID THAT "THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE MINISTER WILL BE A HELICOPTER."

5. IN THIS INTERVIEW, PAREDES CONFIRMED ANNOUNCEMENT BY NATIONAL GUARD THAT HIS DESIGNATION AS MINISTER DID NOT AFFECT HIS POSITION AS ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF G-1 (PERSONNEL) ON GENERAL STAFF, IN WHICH HE WOULD CONTINUE TO SERVE AT ORDERS OF GEN. TORRIJOS.

6. COMMENT: PAREDES HAS CALLED ON LEADERS OF THE PANAMANIAN FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES, SOMETHING HIS PREDECESSOR NEVER DID. WHETHER THIS SIGNALS MORE VIGOROUS MIDA SUPPORT FOR THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT REMAINS TO BE SEEN. PAREDES IS SCHEDULED TO VISIT PERSONALLY AID OFFICES AUGUST 13, AN INDICATION THAT HE INTENDS TO MAINTAIN CLOSE COMMUNICATION WITH AID. WE CONSIDER THE PAREDES' APPOINTMENT, AND HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS, AS A FAIRLY CLEAR AND STRONG SIGNAL OF GOP INTEREST IN AND EMPHASIS ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING TO INDICATE WHETHER PAREDES' OTHER QUASICIVIL FUNCTIONS (E.G., BAYANO INTEGRATED PROJECT, SAN MIGUELITO SPECIAL COMMISSION, ETC.) WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO OTHER HANDS AS A RESULT OF HIS NEW POSITION. AS YET, WE HAVE NO FIRM INDICATIONS OF HOW TO INTERPRET THIS CHANGE IN PAREDES' STATUS; PRIVATE COMMENT IS UNCERTAIN, PROBABLY DUE TO AN ABSENCE AS YET OF A CLEAR SIGNAL FROM THE TOP, AND THE ONLY PUBLIC REACTION WAS A "MATUTINO" EDITORIAL THE SAME DAY AS THE INTERVIEW WHICH ONLY CALLED ATTENTION TO THE CENTRAL ROLE OF THIS MINISTRY IN TORRIJOS' CONCEPT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS, AND HAILED PAREDES' APPOINTMENT AS APPROPRIATE IN THIS LIGHT. ACCORDINGLY, WE ARE NOT YET ABLE TO ASSESS WHETHER THE NEW POSITION REPRESENTS AN ENHANCEMENT OF PAREDES' PERSONAL POLITICAL POSITION THROUGH HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE MINISTRY MORE WIDELY VISIBLE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, OR A PRELUDE TO HIS DECLINE THROUGH ASSOCIATION WITH THE TRADITIONALLY TROUBLESOME SUBJECT OF AGRICULTURAL POLICY. END COMMENT.

JORDEN

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